The State Of Things

E Post 5-29-72

By Val Hymes

Little People Strategy

When the bullets ripped into presidential candidate George Wallace at a typical Maryland shopping center, the world gasped in horror, but the political impact did not hit until much later.

The gut irony of the tragedy is that the very "little people" campaign effort mounted by the southern Governor will be destroyed eventually by his attempted murder.

The "little people" approach to the democratic process by both Democratic and Republican Party leaders is under a cloud not only because of the attack on a candidate but because of the serious conflict faced today by most of the delegates to the Democratic convention.

There is no question that George Wallace appealed to the protest vote. The same people who have protested open housing, gun control laws, sex education and abortion reform, followed Wallace to his rallies, just as did suspected assailant Arthur Bremer. There is no question that the people who fear what they cannot control worshipped George Wallace.

In every section of the State — in Frederick, too — applauding Wallace were the people who seem to have been disappointed, misled or discouraged by the political system. His popularity seemed unbeatable with a following few candidates could put their fingers on — a forgotten majority, not really silent but smoldering and simmering, ready to boil when George Wallace turned on the charisma of anger against busing, foreign aid and welfare loafers.

These are the people who clapped and nearly cried in Cumberland, who hailed him in Hagerstown despite warnings of trouble that came on a summery Saturday, and who took part in the Frederick fracas that was shrugged off by the newsmen, the candidate, and the police. These were the people who were frisked but cheered anyway in Baltimore, and who avoided trouble in Cambridge as police isolated hecklers from hoorayers.

The omens of trouble that ticked off the time clock at Laurel before Wallace crumpled almost at my feet may be hindsight, but they struck me as significant.

The ominous weather, his suddenly developed cough, his interruption of his speech to notice that someone had fainted in the crowd, his law - and - order warning that the courts would be lenient if somebody "gets hit in the head when they walk away from this shopping center today."

These brought memories of rocks at Hagerstown, pennies and popsicles at Landover, bricks and bottles at Frederick, and the paper airplanes and tomatoes at Wheaton. It was chilling to realize later that I had stood next to Arthur Bremer in Wheaton — and perhaps elsewhere too — as the housewives, small businessmen, blue - and white - collar workers screamed their approval of George Wallace — the person and the symbol.

These are the people who voted for George Wallace on May 16 — more of them than voted for anyone else — but many of these are also the people who will vote for Richard Nixon in November.

The leaders of both parties made every effort to involve the "little people" in every phase of the presidential campaign and nomination. But they did not reckon with the attempted assassination of the man who was playing on the frustrations of thousands of those little people when they drew the ground rules that guaranteed the winner of a congressional district at least one ballot in Florida.

Despite the Wallace martyrdom, and despite Governor Mandel's warning and the Maryland law that says they must vote for the winner in their district, many of the newly elected delegates may challenge the law and risk even a conspiracy charge by voting "their conscience" — the party guideline — or abstaining altogether.

So the popular success of his little people campaign got George Wallace a lot of headlines and applause but too few convention votes — he has fewer committed than the other candidates he bested in the primaries. So what is left? His own campaign officials said Maryland and Michigan ended his primary assault and began his planned effort to appeal to party machineries of non - primary states where party bosses continue to rule.

Campaigning may never be totally relegated to the electronic medium — the plastic candidate seen only on a screen — but with this tragedy and the opening of the national convention doors, an era will be ended.

While every effort will still be made to involve the public in the selection of a president, every effort will be made simultaneously to separate that public from the vulnerable

candidate.

For as George Wallace lay bleeding on the pavement of a neighborhood shopping center, the "little people" strategy was suddenly obsolete.

THE BREMER CASE — Grand juries were planning to meet simultaneously Tuesday to begin the long legal machinery toward the Federal and State trials of George Wallace's suspected assailant. The 21 - year - old Wisconsin man faces indictments for assault, violating a candidate's civil rights, and for violating Maryland's new gun control law by carrying a gun without a permit and committing a felony with it.

The Justice Department may ask for other indictments for carrying a gun across state lines to commit a crime, and the Prince George's prosecutor, Arthur A. Marshall Jr., was seeking four separate assault counts as well as the gun law charges.

Governor Mandel, meanwhile, has called for a Federal gun law, saying Maryland can't solve a national ill by itself.

MEMORABILIA — The bookkeeper at the Holiday Inn where Wallace housed his Maryland headquarters will remember something else about the 1972 primary election. Mrs. Charlotte Carder was given a single red rose from the bouquet that had stood with George Wallace on the podium at Laurel while he delivered his final speech on the Maryland campaign trail.